

Lambda Letters Project

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and Cultural Exchange
Sacramento, CA

32600

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www.lambdaletters.org

LambdaLP@aol.com

(916) 965-6851

A Time for Renewed Commitment, Part II

"The most effective communicators are those who live, not just say, what they believe." —Anonymous

I have sometimes heard the complaint that the "leaders" in our community are out of touch with the feelings and needs of the rest of us. Presumably, as administrator of the Lambda Letters Project, I am one of those "leaders." I don't take the criticism personally, but it does sometimes create a sense of frustration in me.

Generally speaking, there is very little upwards communication from the members of Lambda Letters to its leadership. Each year we send a survey to our members asking their priorities. Responses have been good; usually about half of you return the survey. But one of the oldest rules about surveys is that how you ask the question affects the answer you get. Do we really know what issues concern you most and what your views on them are? We need more input.

Each year we invite our members to Lambda Letters' annual meeting. Usually no more than two or three show up. We have always published the names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of our board and

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The Sound of the Other Shoe Dropping

Did anyone hear the other shoe drop on Primary Election Day, June 2nd? Some of us have been waiting for signs that the growing number of people of color in our state would start wielding their power at the ballot box, perhaps to the detriment of the Anglo-Saxon community, which has a long history of racism or the toleration of racism.

The first hint of what the future may bring occurred on election day when, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, Latinos accounted for 12 percent of the total voter turnout. That may not sound like much, but it was double the turnout of Latinos in the previous primary election. The *Times* also reported that Latinos voted 2 to 1 against Proposition 227, which effectively eliminates bilingual education in California's schools.

Many Latinos are angry about the outcome of that vote and, as their political power grows in this state, they may well use that power to get even. They are quickly building the means to do so. For example, the speaker of the state assembly is now a Latino and on June 2nd Latinos were nominated to run for four statewide offices in the fall election. It is long past due

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Lambda Letters Progress Report

Letters Collected

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| May, 1998 | 17,861 letters |
| In all of 1998 | 53,044 letters |

Dollars Spent

| | |
|----------------|---------|
| May, 1998 | \$2,254 |
| In all of 1998 | \$7,207 |

Can You Help?

Please support the very important work of the Lambda Letters Project with your contributions.

Lambda Letters Project

Statement of Purpose

To promote people of color, feminist, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and HIV/AIDS status advocacy, and to bring people of color, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered persons, and persons affected by or living with HIV/AIDS into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof.

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 Michael Butler, Antelope, (916) 722-6301, mbutler@gvn.net
 Lynn Dobbs, San Diego, (619) 275-5343, partners@access1.net
 Ray Leber, Sacramento, (916) 925-5368
 Scott Roy, Upland, (909) 985-7652, roykit@aol.com

Staff

Administrator: Boyce Hinman, (916) 965-6851, lambdalp@aol.com
 Newsletter Editor: Stefan Grünwedel, (650) 655-3154, s-t-e-f-a-n@earthling.net
 Legislative Analyst, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Issues: Hilary Cook, (619) 260-0561, hcook@earthlink.net
 Legislative Analyst, HIV/AIDS Status Issues: Vacant
 Legislative Analyst, People of Color Issues: Vacant
 Legislative Analyst, Women's Issues: Carla Leek, (916) 442-5169
 Database Manager: Charles Penn, (916) 663-4951, cpenn@foothill.net
 Webmaster: Lynn Dobbs, San Diego (619) 275-5343, partners@access1.net
 E-mail Alert Advocate, Federal AIDS Issues: Joe Heller, (520) 762-9787, jrheller@dakotacom.net

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Confidentiality

The Lambda Letters Project does not sell or loan its mailing list to anyone. We give no information about who is, or is not, a member of the Project. We do, occasionally, send mailings on behalf of other worthwhile organizations, but this is done by our own volunteers so that no other organization has the opportunity to copy our mailing lists.

The Lambda Letters Newsletter is published monthly except in December by the Lambda Letters Project Inc.,

6212 Silverton Way, Carmichael, CA 95608.

Postmaster: send address changes to the address above.

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Business-card sized ads (3½" x 2") \$10 per issue, quarter-page ads \$20 per issue, half-page ads \$30 per issue, full-page ads \$50 per issue. Deadline for payment and camera-ready copy, along with your name and phone number, is the 25th of each month.

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|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
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PWA Medical Benefits

by Boyce Hinman

Many people living with HIV/AIDS are benefiting from the new drug therapies, such as protease inhibitors, to the point of even being able to return to work. Unfortunately, people with AIDS (PWAs) find that they lose access to health care and treatment due to probationary periods in which the employer does not provide health insurance and in which Medi-Cal benefits may be limited or nonexistent.

According to AIDS Project Los Angeles, almost half of PWAs rely on Medi-Cal to pay for medical care. The fear of losing access to health care prevents many of them from going back to work.

Assemblymember Carole Migden (D-San Francisco) is intent on resolving this problem. She has introduced A.B. 20, which would ensure access to health care when a PWA is unable to find private coverage and when a disruption in treatment would endanger the individual's health.

Existing law establishes the Medi-Cal program to provide comprehensive health care services to eligible low-income and disabled individuals. However, existing law also mandates that individuals returning to work lose their disability benefits and face high share-of-cost expenses under Medi-Cal.

For example, if a person takes a job paying \$2,000 per month, his or her Medi-Cal share of cost would be \$957 per month. Taxes would be another \$500 per month, leaving just \$543 per month for all other living expenses. Thus, if the new employment doesn't provide full medical insurance coverage, including pre-existing conditions, the person would probably be better off not going to work.

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2321 Lloyd Lane
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Tel: (916) 486-8985
Fax: (916) 481-3224

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Dioxin Surprise

by Carla Leek

People generally know that dioxin—a by-product of the paper manufacturing process—is harmful.

H.R. 2900, the Tampon Safety and Research Act of 1997, sponsored in the House of Representatives by Carolyn Maloney (D-New York), would direct the National Institutes of Health to study the extent to which the presence of dioxin, synthetic fibers, and other additives in tampons and similar products used by women with respect to menstruation pose risks to the health of women.

This is not a trivial topic. According to Maloney, far more research has been conducted on dioxin in bleached coffee filters than has been done on the presence of dioxin in tampons and related products.

If this issue is new to you, take a moment to read the following excerpts from Maloney's introductory remarks regarding the bill:

- ♦ Tampons often contain chemical additives, synthetic fibers (such as rayon), and dioxin.
- ♦ Dioxin is a known cancer-causing agent in animals.
- ♦ A 1996 EPA study linked dioxin exposure to increased risk for endometriosis (popularly called "endo"), a chronic, incurable disease that affects one in four women.
- ♦ Tampons are used by up to 70 percent of menstruating women in the United States.
- ♦ The average woman menstruates for 40 years.
- ♦ During her lifetime, the average woman can use over 11,000 tampons.
- ♦ The tissue inside a woman's vagina is extremely absorbent, making it likely that chemicals like dioxin are absorbed efficiently.

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The Safety Net Is Gone

by Boyce Hinman

Usually our nation's leaders say they are committed to providing a safety net for the poorest of the poor. Yet for certain immigrants who are here legally, the safety net is gone.

Federally funded Social Security Income (SSI) provides cash assistance to low-income elderly, blind, and disabled persons. Yet under the federal welfare reform laws this assistance is unavailable to legal immigrants who were in the United State prior to August 22, 1996, but were not receiving SSI before that date. It is also unavailable to legal immigrants who entered the U.S. after that date.

Federally funded food stamps are also unavailable to legal immigrants. Congress is considering legislation to restore food stamps to children and the elderly, but not to legal immigrants between the ages of 18 and 64.

For many legal immigrants hunger haunts their lives—and now their safety net is gone. Studies commissioned by the counties of Los Angeles and San Francisco have found there is moderate to severe hunger in half of the households that lost SSI and food stamps under federal welfare reform.

Homeless shelters—and other feeding programs that serve the poor—have also reported large increases in requests for food assistance since the advent of the reform laws. The State Legislative Analyst's Office estimates that 241,000 immigrants in the state lost food stamps. Los Angeles alone cut off 120,000 immigrants—12 percent of the national total. That's a lot of hungry people.

Assemblymember Villaraigosa (D-Los Angeles) has introduced A.B. 2463 to remedy this situation. His bill would provide state-funded SSI and food stamps to legal immigrants aged 18 to 64 and to children and adults who came to this country after August 22, 1996, and who are not eligible for the federal programs.

These are the poor and the hungry. We cannot just ignore them.

It is likely that A.B. 2463 will be passed by the legislator but will face resistance from the governor. Please write to Governor Wilson. Urge him to support the bill and sign it.

Finally, Protections in the Workplace

by Hilary Cook

In a move that has both symbolic and practical implications, President Clinton signed an executive order on May 28th formally banning sexual orientation against federal civilian workers. At the same time he reiterated the need for Congress to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act which would extend such protections to all employees, not just the 1.8 million people in the federal workforce.

During his 1992 campaign Clinton promised to sign executive orders barring sexual orientation discrimination in both the federal civilian and military context. When furor erupted over the military plan, the president backed down (later signing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" instead) and the civilian plan fell by the wayside.

In late 1993 the Administration decided on the more low-key, and less effective, method of merely encouraging individual civilian agencies to adopt non-discrimination policies. In 1995 Clinton signed an executive order barring federal agencies from denying security clearances solely because of sexual orientation. This ended a long-standing practice of automatically assuming that gay men, lesbians, or bisexuals were blackmail risks.

The result was a mishmash. A 1978 law prohibiting discrimination against federal employees for "conduct which does not adversely affect" their work had provided some protection. Some agencies had added sexual orientation to their nondiscrimination policies.

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State Legislative Update, Part III

This is the third of a series of articles to inform you of the progress of both good and bad bills through our state legislature. We have been successful in moving many of the good bills and stopping some of the bad ones. The flow of your letters and e-mail messages to our state legislature has been much greater than usual this year (53,000 pieces of mail by May 31st) and we think that has something to do with our success in the halls of the state legislature. Thank you for doing your part in our community's effort!

Typically each bill is voted on by two committees in the state assembly and two in the state senate, and approved by the full assembly and senate before it is sent to the governor for signature or veto. The first committee is a policy committee which, in theory, determines whether the bill makes sense from a policy viewpoint. The second committee is an appropriations committee which determines whether the expenditures are reasonable and that money for the bill is available.

According to the rules of the legislature, each bill had to be approved by the relevant committees, and by its house of origin, no later than May 29th. For example, A.B. bills, which originate in the assembly, must be approved by the full assembly and sent to the senate by that date. There are always exceptions, but generally any bill that fails to gain approval of their house of origin by the deadline is dead.

Bills that do make it to the second house of the legislature must be approved by the policy committee in that house no later than July 3rd and the appropriations committee in that house by August 14th. The final day for bills to be approved by both houses of the legislature and sent to the governor is August 31st.

Starting at right is the list of some of the bills we have been working on.

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(Note: This article was written before some of the hearings for the bills in the following list.)

HIV/AIDS Issues

A.B. 1663 (Carole Migden, D-San Francisco)

Purpose: To require the state to conduct studies of unique identifier systems of tracking the spread of HIV, that do not require the reporting of the names of people who test positive for HIV.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed by the assembly. Now in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. Hearing date set for 6/24.

A.B. 2737 (Dion Aroner, D-Oakland)

Purpose: To create the Supportive Housing Fund to provide housing for homeless and other very low-income and disabled persons, including those with AIDS.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed by the assembly. Now in the Senate Local Government Committee. Hearing date set for 7/1.

A.B. 2762 (Dion Aroner, D-Oakland)

Purpose: To require the state to request a waiver from the federal government to allow the state to use Medi-Cal funds to care for poor HIV-positive people who do not have full-blown AIDS. Currently they must have full-blown AIDS to receive Medi-Cal benefits.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed by the assembly. Now in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. Hearing date set for 7/1.

S.B. 705 (Richard Rainey, R-Walnut Creek)

Purpose: To criminalize the "intentional" transmission of HIV through unprotected sex.

LLP Position: Oppose.

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Silence is the virtue of fools.

— Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

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Legislative Update

Continued from page 5

Status: Has passed the senate and all assembly committees. Is in the inactive file on the assembly floor. Author is discussing amendments to it to get enough votes for passage.

L/G/B/T Issues

A.B. 1059 (Carole Migden, D-San Francisco)

Purpose: To require that all health insurance companies that offer policies covering employees and their spouses also offer coverage for employees and their domestic partners. Does not require employers to buy coverage for their employee's domestic partners.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed both houses of the legislature. Pending on the assembly floor for the assembly to vote on changes made to the bill in the senate.

A.B. 1999 (Sheila Kuehl, D-Encino)

Purpose: To amend the state's Hate Crimes Statistics Act by adding gender and defining gender to include transgendered people. Provides stiffer penalties for hate-motivated crimes based on gender and gender identity. Requires the counting and reporting of such hate crimes.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed by the assembly. Now in the Senate Public Safety Committee. Hearing date set for 6/23.

A.B. 2156 (Fred Keeley, D-Santa Cruz)

Purpose: To strengthen the California Labor Code sections that prohibit sexual orientation-based employment discrimination. Increases the deadline for filing a complaint from 30 days to a year. Requires employers to post notices that sexual orientation-based employment discrimination is illegal and to display list of offices at which complaints may be filed.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed by the assembly. Now in Senate Industrial Relations Committee. Hearing date set for 6/24.

S.B. 1506 (Tom Hayden, D-Los Angeles)

Purpose: To require employers to allow their employees to take unpaid medical leave to care for domestic partners and others who depend on the employee for care.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Failed on the senate floor.

People of Color Issues

A.C.A. 3 (Kevin Murray, D-Culver City)

Purpose: To allow the state to take any measures necessary to enhance equal opportunity in California.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: In Assembly Judiciary Committee. No date set for hearing yet. Note: A.C.A. 3 is a proposed constitutional amendment. Constitutional amendments do not have to meet the deadlines discussed above.

A.B. 1532 (Kevin Shelley, D-San Francisco)

Purpose: To authorize state grants to cities and counties to establish interpreter programs to assist the police in serving non-Englishspeaking crime victims.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed by the assembly and by the Senate Public Safety Committee. Now in Senate Appropriations Committee. Hearing date set for 6/29.

A.B. 1784 (Joe Baca, D-San Bernardino)

Purpose: To provide \$10 million to fund substance abuse programs for adolescents in the ten counties with the most at-risk adolescents.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed by assembly. Now in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. Hearing date set for 7/1.

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MELINDA M. WHITEWAY
Attorney and Counselor at Law

Whiteway Law Offices

143 Sacramento Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
Ph: 408/458-2545
Fax: 408/458-3516
Email: MELINDAMW@aol.com



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Legislative Update

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A.B. 2031 (Gilbert Cedillo, D-Los Angeles)

Purpose: To prevent the governor from denying access of legal resident aliens to many state-funded health programs for the poor.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed by assembly. Now in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. Hearing date set for 7/1.

S.B. 1500 (Richard Polanco, D-Los Angeles)

Purpose: To outlaw the manufacture, import, sale, possession, or loaning of unsafe guns.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed by the senate. Now in the Assembly Public Safety Committee. Hearing date set for 6/23.

Women's Issues

A.B. 499 (Sheila Kuehl, D-Encino)

Purpose: To systematize and strengthen the state education code, particularly as it relates to discrimination, including sex discrimination.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed assembly. Stuck in the Senate Education Committee because of opposition from the governor. Assemblymember Kuehl is seeking a compromise with the governor.

A. B. 1112 (Bob Hertzberg, D-Van Nuys)

Purpose: To require HMOs and insurance providers to cover the cost of contraceptives.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed assembly and passed the Senate Insurance Committee. Pending in Senate Appropriations Committee. Hearing date set for 6/22.

A.B. 1926 (Scott Wildman, D-Glendale)

Purpose: To limit the ability of defense lawyers to put rape victims on trial by claiming that the victim's clothing was an invitation to have sex.

LLP Position: Support.



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of your elected officials.



LLP Sets New Record

Until now, the greatest number of letters ever collected by Lambda Letters in a single year was 48,250 collected in 1996. That record fell in May this year when the Project collected 17,861 letters, bringing our total for the year to 53,044. It now appears probable that we will deliver 80,000 to 90,000 letters to elected officials by the end of the year.

E-mail has made the difference. Recently we have been producing 10,000 to 15,000 letters per month to elected officials through our e-mail alert system. The Project now sends five to ten alerts each month about fast-breaking events in our state legislature and in Congress. Our alerts provide background information on an important bill, along with a sample letter and a list of e-mail addresses of the legislators who should receive them.

The response has been very gratifying and, as you can see in the legislative update, many of the bills we support are doing very well. We think the outpouring of support from you on our regular mailing list, and those on our e-mail alert list, has a lot to do with that success.

Would you like to receive our e-mail alerts? If so, just send a request to LambdaLP@aol.com.

Status: Passed the assembly and all senate committees. Awaiting a final vote on the senate floor.

A.B. 2592 (Howard Wayne, D-San Diego)

Purpose: To use tobacco taxes to fund prevention and treatment of breast cancer, with special emphasis on low-income Native American and minority women.

LLP Position: Support.

Status: Passed by the assembly. Now in Senate Health and Human Services Committee. Hearing date set for 7/1.

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Renewed Commitment

Continued from page 1

staff. However, I am unaware of anyone ever calling or e-mailing us with their concerns. We do occasionally get comments back with the signed letters but those are usually a general thank-you or a complaint that we did or said something that we shouldn't have. That's good information, but we also need to know what we should be doing and saying.

Often when labor unions feel management isn't responsive to the worker's needs, they demand that union members be put on the company's board of directors. By having a seat at the position of power, the unions can make the company deal honestly with its employees' needs. This has a direct bearing on our community. For example, for years the Human Rights Campaign, chief sponsor of the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act, has refused to support the addition of protections for transgendered people to that act. I am sure that their position would be different if transgendered people were represented on their board of directors.

Which brings me back to Lambda Letters. One of the best ways for us to get a clear picture of our diverse communities' needs and concerns is to have a diverse leadership. We now have three bisexuals on our board of directors. Two of them are officers of the Project. Also, one of our legislative analysts is bisexual. However we have no transgendered people or people of color on our board and staff. We have only one female on the board. (In the past our board was indeed more diverse than it is now. However, this has changed as people have left and joined the board over time.)

All of the great leaders of this century—such as Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, etc.—were absolute masters at communicating their beliefs and dreams. King was certainly a great orator, but he and the others informed and inspired us most because they lived their message. The message was in what they did with their lives.

We need women, people of color, and transgendered people willing to communicate their feelings and needs by taking positions

Other Shoe Dropping

Continued from page 1

that we fully and forcefully commit ourselves to equal justice for all people, including people of color.

In early June another incredible example of this country's racism was revealed when it was reported that the U.S. government reached a settlement with Japanese Latin-Americans over their internment by the U.S. government during World War II. Each of those interned are to receive an official apology and \$5,000 reparations.

We are all aware that many innocent Japanese Americans were interned in this country during the war. Many of them lost their homes and businesses as a result. However, our government also forcibly removed over 2,000 people of Japanese ancestry from Latin America (most of them from Peru) and put them in internment camps here in the United States.

This country has a lot of past injustice to make up for and the time to start is now.

of leadership in Lambda Letters. At the front of this newsletter you can find the job description for members of our board, with the list of criteria for board candidates on the back. Please give serious consideration to joining the leadership of Lambda Letters. Help us hear the concerns of our diverse community.

Boyce Hinman
Administrator

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Medical Benefits for PWAs

Continued from page 3

A.B. 20 provides that any earnings up to \$2,500 per month of an individual who is receiving treatment for HIV or AIDS, and who returns to work, shall not count towards his or her Medi-Cal share-of-cost requirement until the person is eligible for and receives full medical insurance coverage, for a period of six months.

Assemblymember Migden believes this bill is cost-effective because it enables disabled individuals to return to work and to leave state-funded programs linked to Medi-Cal, such as State Supplemental Payments and Social Security Income (SSP/SSI). This reduces state costs and allows those returning to work to contribute to the tax base.

A.B. 20 has passed the assembly and will probably have passed the Senate Health and Human Services by the time you read this article. Please write to the Senate Appropriations Committee urging support of A.B. 20.

Workplace Protections

Continued from page 4

Many had failed to act, and most employees had no idea that any protections existed, or how to access them.

A 1997 investigation by the *Washington Blade* alerted the White House to the confusion reigning among both personnel managers and other staff. This news apparently led to the recent executive order. Clinton's action makes the government the largest employer with a written sexual orientation antidiscrimi-

Dioxin Surprise

Continued from page 3

- ♦ The tissue inside a woman's vagina is also fatty, and fatty tissue is where dioxin is stored.
- ♦ The FDA requires tampon manufacturers to monitor dioxin levels in their products. However, the results of the monitoring are not available to the public.

H.R. 2900 is currently in the House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment. If you want to read the bill's text or Maloney's comments in their entirety online, check out Thomas (Congress on the Internet) at thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.html. You can search by bill number, and there are links to all kinds of details regarding the bill.

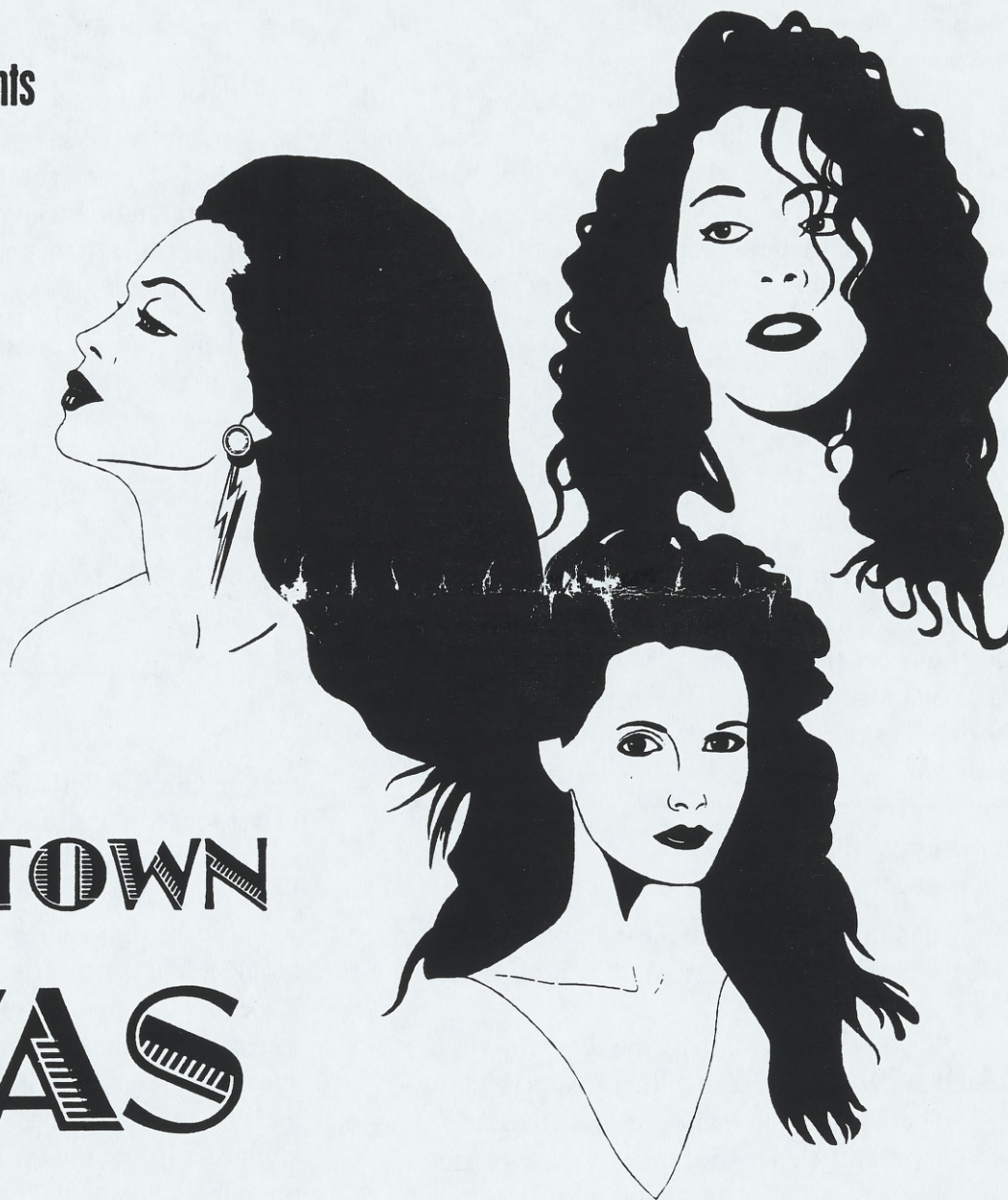


nation policy. It will mean a more unified policy and better access to information about employees' rights and what procedures are available when they have been violated.

Please sign your letter thanking the president for taking a stand on this issue. The right-wing Family Research Council has gone on record with the very misleading claim that the president's action will force "a special preference for homosexuality into government and private workplaces." That organization is asking Congress to rescind the executive order. Let the president know that we notice when he does the right thing—even if we wonder what took him so long.

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